

Best of Victoria Restaurants 2010

Restaurant reviewer Pam Grant has sampled food all over Greater Victoria. Today she looks back at her favourites of 2010.

BY PAM GRANT, TIMESCOLONIST.COM JANUARY 6, 2011



Chef Michael Minshull at The Mark restaurant in the Hotel Grand Pacific: Unique, harmonious dishes.

Photograph by: LYLE STAFFORD, Timescolonist.com

Basilico Ristorante and Lounge

832 Goldstream Ave.

Langford

250-391-5589

Pizza hovers between Italy and Texas, with combos ranging from sausage, mozzarella and basil to chicken with barbecue sauce, mushrooms, peppers and onions. Pastas include spaghetti marinara and meatballs to linguini with chicken, apples, pear, cashews and broccoli in curried cream. Dishes like rabbit cacciatore, chicken Parmigiana and mixed grill of lamb, flank steak and hot Italian sausage are ample and well executed.

Ho-Ting Chinese Restaurant

809 Craigflower Rd.

250-383-8897

Solid, family-run Chinese restaurant, which like most in Victoria might cater to Western palates more than Asian ones. That being said, an affordable menu offers a decent range of dishes, portions are excellent and food tastes fresh. Skip the egg foo yung, and sweet and sour, and try anything with noodles, gai lan with garlic, black bean prawns, and salt and pepper squid. Lunch specials and combination dinners are excellent value; service is fast and friendly.

The Village Restaurant

2518 Estevan Ave. Oak Bay

250-592-8311

Perhaps Victoria's best spot for all-day breakfast. This atmospheric little spot in equally minuscule Estevan Village is packed on weekends, but perfect for quiet reading or catching up over a meal on weekdays, with blintzes, latkes, turkey sausages, and a dish of hash browns with cheese, onions and smoked meat that a teenage hockey player would find filling. Don't want breakfast? Have a house salad with almonds and sliced turkey, or a Reuben sandwich with soup of the day.

Tibetan Kitchen

680 Broughton St.

250-383-5664

Must-haves include momos — Tibetan dumplings — warmed with slivers of scallion and ginger and chef/owner Pemba Doma's homemade chutneys, crisp spring rolls and chilled beet salad with coconut milk enhanced with cardamom, cumin, coriander and lime. Superb curries come with your choice of white or brown basmati rice and poori. Also open for breakfast if you fancy a samosa and chai instead of the usual espresso and biscotti. Good for your bank balance, body and soul. Everything here is affordable and chemical-free.

Sabhai Thai

2493 Beacon Ave.

Sidney

250-655-4085

Closed for part of January; call ahead

Be warned, if you plan a visit here, you might want to make a reservation. One bite of sweet chili and garlic chicken wings or restorative hot and sour soup and you'll know why. Curries are simmered in coconut milk with distinctive bursts of garlic, shallots, lime and herbs. Superb goong nam prik pow offers sautéed prawns and vegetables; gai yang — barbecued chicken — comes in big chunks oozing with garlic and lemongrass. Try praram long song — tender beef in peanut sauce. A good stop before or after the ferry, unless you like prefab burgers and pizza.

The Ledge Lounge

Bedford Regency Hotel

1140 Government St.

250-384-6835

Though a lounge, not a restaurant, the Ledge offers affordable food and an interesting refuge off touristy Government Street. Chipotle pork sliders and sang chow bow (ground beef, water chestnuts and shitake mushrooms flavoured with hoisin and oyster sauces stuffed in lettuce leaves) make good starts. Burgers include a house-made veggie patty bursting with nuts and cilantro or Cajun salmon. Main courses well under \$20 include sirloin steak, chicken and wild mushroom pie, and roast butternut squash and baby spinach risotto.

Ristorante La Piola

3189 Quadra St.

250-388-4517

The next time you're driving through north Quadra at lunch time, stop here for panini stuffed with marinated vegetables or Prosciutto cotto and aged provolone, served with soup or salad. All-day thin crust pizzas here include salami Sopressa, prosciutto cotto, and local sausage or anchovy, capers, tomato sauce and mozzarella. Freshly made pasta comes with sauces such as beef and pork ragu or a l'Amatriciana with pancetta, tomato, onion, white pepper and Pecorino Romano. Weekly meat and fish specials are based on local ingredients.

Golden Chopsticks Chinese Restaurant

627 Fort St.

250-388-3148

The chef makes her own sauces, offering Cantonese, Szechaun and Thai options, with the odd Japanese and Malaysian influenced dish. Try a bowl of soup brimming with scallops, white fish, prawns, squid and noodles, or shredded chicken and preserved vegetables. Satay prawns or curried beef flank served with steamed rice will revive you. Evenings, try the appetizer platter with barbecued pork, battered prawns, crisp wontons stuffed with pork and shrimp, and fried rolls filled with curried beef and piquant Thai style beef and fresh cilantro. Don't miss the eggplant hot pot.

The Mark

Hotel Grand Pacific

463 Belleville St.

250-380-4487

The city's most exclusive dining spot seats 26. Menus illustrate genuine respect for both ingredient and methodology, offering unique and faultlessly harmonious dishes. Indulge in one of the seasonally themed tasting menus or dine à la carte, with local oysters with horseradish oil and preserved lemon mignonette, followed by local duck breast, butternut squash and chestnut confit and molasses butter. Dessert? Perhaps roasted pear tart scented with fennel seed and orange zest, served with tarragon

panna cotta and cranberry compote. Service in all venues at this hotel, whether a formal evening at the Mark or Chef Choy's fabulous dim sum on the patio of the more relaxed Pacific Restaurant is simply exceptional.

Nar

2540 Windsor Rd. Oak Bay

250-598-1085

Closed until Jan. 18

This tiny Oak Bay restaurant offers authentic Turkish dishes in a homey atmosphere. Sample meze including dolma, red pepper and walnut dip or cauliflower salad; or for \$24.50, a three-course dinner with salad and pomegranate molasses dressing or traditional soup, followed by grilled chicken or roast lamb served with eggplant purée before finishing with lemon cake or crisp baklava. Traditional coffee comes with Turkish delight and a smile.

Kim's Vietnamese Restaurant

748 Johnson St.

250-385-0455

For lunch, try grilled tiger prawn cake with sugarcane and brochette of garlic meatballs and a crunchy spring roll, rice noodles or tender broiled beef wrapped in grape leaves, with shrimp and pork salad roll and a ginger peppercorn-infused chicken brochette with fried rice. Call ahead for take-out and it will be ready for you. Evenings are quieter, allowing for a more leisurely meal. Start with soup and cha gio — fried parcels of pork, shrimp, vegetables and noodles bound in crunchy wheat wrappers.

West Coast Tap House

Four Points by Sheraton Victoria Gateway

829 McCallum Rd.

Langford

250-474-6063

You might have been here only for the addictive chicken wings and a beer post-Costco shopping, but there's some good food coming out of this kitchen, including excellent burgers made in-house from ground brisket, veal and sirloin with a long list of toppings, and entrées including Jambalaya, butter chicken and seared steaks drizzled with a sherry-laden, Szechuan-inspired sauce. Competitively priced specials.

Fifteen Fifty's Restaurant

1550 Cedar Hill Cross Rd.

250-472-0047

Pub style family restaurant with lunch specials including hearty soups and massive sandwiches such as a shrimp melt with Hollandaise and Edam or an open faced sandwich loaded with chicken, sautéed onions, peppers and mushrooms. Heart smart no, delicious yes. Affordable evening specials range from pasta nights to prime rib with all the trimmings. Good luck saving room for dessert.

Evedar's Bistro and Wine Bar

2829 Peatt Rd. Langford

250-391-8636

By day, think freshly baked cinnamon buns, ample salads and sandwiches packed with everything you can think of. At night things go way up- market with dishes like crab cakes with smoked paprika aioli and English pea purée; bouillabaisse brimming with clams, mussels, prawns, scallops and salmon; or grilled lamb sirloin à la Niçoise, served in thick slices, drizzled with red wine sauce enriched with briny black olives, basil, roast garlic and tomatoes with crisp rosti. So worth the drive.

Bon Sushi

1467 Hampshire Rd.

Oak Bay

250-592-0008

A casual neighbourhood haunt that does some good tempura and sushi, but suffers from inconsistent service and product information. Soup is good, seared tuna dressed with ponzu sauce is excellent, but take a pass on the bento boxes.

Ulla

509 Fisgard St.

250-590-8795

The new kid in town has made a lot of people in the industry sit up and take notice. Simple, elegant and proof that less is more. Aperitifs arrive in chilled glasses. Service is informed. Food is intriguing and beautiful to behold, and lives up to expectations. Think frisée salad with white truffle mayo and mushroom arancini; pork loin with crackling savoy cabbage, celeriac, bacon, apple and cheddar; and chocolate cake with rice crispy crunch, hazelnut cream and brittle to finish.

Green Leaf Bistro

1684 Douglas St.

250-590-8302

Extensive menu with soups, salads, noodle and rice-based dishes and an additional section dedicated to vegetarian diners. Lunch also offers bánh mì baguette smeared with mayonnaise, filled with pickled vegetables and meat or pate, and incredible salad rolls. Try pork and mushroom stuffed rice crepes; smoky, barbecued quail are also noteworthy. Be prepared for a pleasant surprise when you get the bill.

The Marina Restaurant

1327 Beach Dr. Oak Bay

250-598-8555

Closed until Jan. 8

Sunday Brunch begins with scones, croissants, crisp Belgian waffles with berry compote and whipped cream, and eggs Benedict — or maybe soup and salads ranging from chickpeas and roasted eggplant to penne with artichoke hearts and sundried tomatoes. Try sushi or prawns, local mussels and clams, before a visit to the omelettes, which you can enhance with bacon, sausages or French toast. But try to save room to sample the featured hot dishes and the carved meats. Dessert includes everything from fresh fruit and cheese to various cheesecakes, fruits, meringues and more. Schedule a walk for afterward.

Amrikko's Fine Indian Cuisine

298 Old Island Highway

250-744-3330

Mixed appetizers are a good way to start at this friendly newcomer to the capital, with plump samosas and two kinds of spiced Indian fritters — white meat chicken pakoras bound in gently spiced batter, and earthy mixed vegetable pakoras with bursts of cardamom. Curries feature dishes slightly more British than Indian, with choices like tikka masalas, but watch the board for dishes like chicken dopiaza. Good biryanis, desserts and plenty for vegetarians. Family friendly, too.

Al-Sultan

1813 Douglas St.

250-590-4044

Shawarma in this homey spot is as it should be: grilled pita with spit-roasted marinated meat with a hint of smoke and sweet spice, crunchy vegetables and garlicky sauce. The evening buffet offers salad, hummus and tzatziki, gently spiced lentil soup, smoky ful medames, the best falafel I have eaten in Victoria, tandoori chicken, a trio of tomato-based stews flavoured with garlic and lemon featuring white kidney beans, okra and potato, and regional specialties from the owners' homeland, urog tawa (wheat-based fritters with ground meat, tomato and eggplant) and cheikh al mahchi (tiny eggplants stuffed with spiced meat). Crazy value at less than \$15 per person. Note this is a halal establishment, meaning no alcohol.